MFDP Chapter 33

ALEX SHIMKIN
Interview

Alex Shimkin

in Jackson

FDP summer volunteer

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We're on the second floor of the Masonic Hall in Jackson, Mississippi just down the hall from the NAACP offices, and with us a student who has just come down to the South from Detroit. How old are you?

A. Twenty.

Q. And how long have you been in the civil rights movement, involved in civil rights?

A. Since January.

Q. This was beginning in your home town up in Detroit?

A. Well, it wasn't exactly. I dropped out of school and went to New York, and, I don't know, got a job doing research with a northern students' movement. After that I went to Detroit, and then I was in Alabama for three weeks. Then I went back to Detroit and began working in the movement until I came down here which was yesterday.

Q. What year in school were you when you dropped out?

A. I was in my junior year of college.

Q. And were you involved in civil rights organizations in Detroit before you moved to New York?

A. I was in Ann Arbor. I went to school in Ann Arbor.

Q. University of Michigan?

A. Yeah. I didn't go up in Detroit or anything. No, as a matter of fact, I hadn't.

Q. So you began your work in January. You've become rather deeply involved since that time.

A. Yeah, that's correct.

Q. Were you interested in civil rights? When did you first become concerned about the issues?

A. I think when Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner were killed. Before that I just didn't think about it, but that made something of an impact on me.
Q. Were you down in the South last summer when they worked here?
A. No, I wasn't.

Q. This is your first time in the South?
A. No, this is my second time.

Q. When were you down here before?
A. In the spring.

Q. During the Selma march?
A. I came down the day after the first march had been broken up. I was in the great U-turn that Dr. King lead. Then I was in Selma for a while, then in Montgomery, and in jail and whatnot. Then I went back to Detroit.

Q. Let's see, you said your first concern was when the three civil rights workers were killed up here in Philadelphia. How did you first hear about this? Was it through radio and television, or did you know people who knew the three and talked to them? How did you learn about it?
A. Oh, through the mass media. I had no connection with people in the civil rights movement in those states.

Q. Did you know any individuals who had done work in the South?
A. No, I sort of went with a different set when I was in college, and I didn't have much contact with them. In fact, I can't think of any contact I had with people who had been in the movement before I left school.

Q. Did you have any contact with anybody who had not been in the South, but who was in the movement activities in Michigan?
A. I can't say that I did, actually. I can't say that I had ever heard the word "movement" before January.

Q. And most of your concern for this came through the mass media, as you say.
A. Well, my concern, it's hard to say. I became aware of the problem last summer. But the main thing was that I had some general sympathy with it, and I was out of school, out of a job and whatnot, and this seemed like a good thing to do. It was worthwhile, adventurous, exciting, and I just
didn't have anything else. You know, I just began doing it.

Q. Now that you've been doing it for a while, you've become more and more involved in it. When did you first come down here this summer, just this past week?

A. Yesterday, as a matter of fact.

Q. Yesterday was your first day down here. Could we go into your family background? Are both of your parents still living?

A. They are.

Q. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

A. I have a sister.

Q. Is she older or younger, how old is she?

A. She's sixteen.

Q. Is she involved in civilrights or interested in it?

A. She's started doing tutorial work in Boston.

Q. What sort of opinion do your parents have of what you're doing down here?

A. Well, I think they approve of it in general. I suppose like all parents they wish someone else was doing it instead of . . . I don't know, I'd say my involvement has increased their own interest and commitment and so forth. I think they approve of it.

Q. What sort of family relations do you generally have? What sort of relationship with your parents do you normally keep up? Could you describe this?

A. Well, I write and I see them every so often and stuff. See, I've been away from home since I was a freshman, so leaving school was no big break for me.

Q. When was it that you dropped out of school?

A. In January.

Q. Just this last January?

A. That's right.

Q. You didn't go to live at home after that?
A: No, I didn't.

Q: How have the relationships with your parents been in the past? Do you discuss a lot of topics like politics, civil rights, religion, etc?

A: Not religion, but politics and civil rights, sure.

Q: What background - what political affiliation are your parents?

A: That's a good question - I would describe them as being well, it's a rather mixed thing - my father has something of this tradition of an apolitical servant, who, you know, does his best for the national interest and so forth, irrespective of what government is in power, but this is rather mixed - I mean, he sometimes has strange populistic streaks, but generally, he's in favor of, you know, working - or, I won't say necessarily that he's in favor of, but his mind just works in terms of working within the established order and so forth - the idea that all decisions and so forth are made, you know, within the elite and so forth - is something which is just sort of natural to him. But - so I don't know exactly whether this puts him politically... I - he's become - he's moved rather sharply to the left in the last few years, owing to general disgust with the way things have been going.

Q: Do you know how he's voted in the past two Presidential elections?

A: Well, I mean - ah, I know that he voted for Nixon in 1960, and for Johnson in '64.

Q: How bout your mother - what are her political views?

A: She's sort of - I don't know - a liberal Republican. I say liberal in the sense that she's in favor of all the things that good liberals are in favor of, but she doesn't have the kind of emotional thing many liberals have about President Kennedy, or something like that, and so I would - that is about the best description I could give of her.

Q: How has she voted in the last two elections - do you know that?

A: I think probably in the same - oops, wait a second - I don't think my parents voted in 1960 because I think we were still living in the District of Columbia.

Q: Did they both support Nixon at this time?

A: Well sort of, because they were sort of disenchanted with Kennedy, I mean -

Q: Do you think they would have voted for Nixon, had they been able to vote?
A: I think so. I mean, Kennedy has always struck as being rather - my father's become violently anti-Nixon since then, very violently. I think he would - but - and I think that, I mean, he certainly would not be pro-Kennedy now, but that was more a matter of his personal antipathy toward Kennedy than he now is very violently anti-Nixon.

Q: I see. Your mother voted for Johnson this past year?
A: Yeah.

Q: What about the religious background of your family? Do either of your parents attend church regularly, or are they members of any particular....
A: Oh yeah, they're pretty - they've sort of a funny background. My father was baptized Eastern Orthodox religion. My mother came from a background of sort of late Victorian rationalism, and so she's never taken the business - religion with any immense seriousness, but - I was baptized an Episcopalian, and we've gone through - you know, we've attended various Protestant churches without ever having become too involved in it, and - I think - oh yeah, we're all members of the First Methodist Church of Urbana, Illinois, which is a pretty conservative congregation. But I sort of ceased - sort of lost contact with, you know, that angle of things for a long time, since I haven't been at home.

Q: Have you been to church at all regularly in the past year or two?
A: No, I haven't. In fact I'd be hard pressed to put my finger on any time when I have been to church.

Q: Could you more or less define your religious position at this time - how you feel about religion, what role it plays in your life now, if any?
A: I don't know - you know, well - I don't think about it much, except when I'm scared totally - then I call on assistance from all quarters. But - I don't know - I had a period of being fairly strongly influenced by it - and I suppose that some of this influence was among the things that led me to the movement, regarding it as a desirable alternative - and, but, that's sort of disappeared.

Q: Do you see a connection between the movement and your own religious background?
A: Ah...

Q: I should say between your involvement in the movement and your own religious background?
A: Not between my background. I have certain philosophical views which are as much a religion as anything else, which
are very intimately connected with the movement, but in terms of my own background — no, I wouldn't say that.

Q: Would you go into these philosophical views somewhat?

A: Well — simply a whole intense disgust with the whole idea of an individualistic and competitive system, and desire to substitute a system based on cooperation and love between individuals and so forth — and simply the observed fact that when people are struggling together for something and are afraid and everything, a lot of the formalistic nonsense which society surrounds people with in terms of their relations with one another breaks down, and sort of a general revulsion with people who go around in a state of great moral righteousness because they wear a clean suit and are a registered life insurance agent or something.

Q: Could we go back to your parents a little bit? How much education did each of your folks have?

A: My father has a P.H.D. and my mother has a bachelor's degree.

Q: What does your father do now?

A: He's a professor of geography at the University of Illinois.

Q: And you mother — does she work at all?

A: She does a good deal of technical translation from Russian into English.

Q: I see. Have you lived in that area most of your life?

A: No, I've lived in — I lived in Washington, D.C., New Jersey, Belmont, Massachusetts for a fair time, Washington, D.C., again for six years, I guess. Couple of years in Urbana, Illinois, and then I came to Michigan when I started going to the University of Michigan in September of '52.

Q: So you've been moving around quite a bit. What kind of direct exposure have you had to Negroes — Negro populations before coming down here?

A: Before coming down — well, I mean, working in the North you're certainly working with community people — it's much the same thing, I mean, you build, you know, after a while you build close personal relationships with the people in the community group and so forth. You know, I mean I'd say now that most of my friends are Negroes.

Q: Did you have much contact with Negroes before you became involved in civil rights though?

A: No, not really. I can't say that I did previous to that.
Q: Would you say that you knew any Negroes well before your involvement began?

A: No, I didn't actually.

Q: Your exposure to the Negro probably, do you think was mostly due to the mass media, or would you attribute it to other causes as well?

A: Well, I'd say that that was the main thing that attracted my attention to it, and which made it seem - I mean, I knew in general that there was a - I mean, I knew there was a problem in the North, because even in Urbana you have a little ghetto of wretched housing and all the people hold the lowest and lousiest jobs, and everyone dislikes them and calls them niggers and everything. And it was obvious to me that this was - that the problem was, you know, existed more or less everywhere, but the southern thing received a great deal more publicity, and that was - my original hope was that I could, you know, come down right away and work, but at the time they weren't accepting any people for, you know, right away for the South, so I got into the Northern...

Q: Can you think of any particular experience that is outstanding in your mind as far as causing you to come down to the South, to become very interested and concerned over civil rights?

A: Well, I mean, the question of what brought me down this time was, as much as anything, an interest in - well, besides just that, you know, it's a good experience. I think to have a good exposure - they're somethings about the South which are very educational - but the principal thing was to study the way in which the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party has been organized with a view to developing a similar political form in the 13th Congressional district in Detroit. I mean in other words, when I leave Mississippi, go back and begin working on that, with a view towards the 1966 campaigns.

Q: Do you think your college life had any effect upon your attitudes - your present attitudes towards civil rights?

A: Oh, I don't know, a lot of my philosophical views came out of some of - well, no, out of one course I had, which was something which was called - well which was classical literature in translation. But, I don't know - I can't say most of it - I mean I learned of things but most of them have become completely irrelevant, and I suppose they're stored in the back of my mind somewhere, but.....

Q: Can I ask how a classical literature class - what affect this had on you?

A: Well, simply in the sense it gave me a certain philosophical perspective, in so far as I have a philosophical perspective.

Q: I see. What about your college living group - what sort
of arrangements did you have for living at the University of Michigan?

A: Well, I lived in the dormitory residence hall things for two years, and then in an apartment last fall, and that's about it really.

Q: Was there a lot of conversation among the people in the halls or in your apartment concerning civil rights, etc.?

A: Mostly it was about women. But I don't know. I can't - my freshman year I can't - freshman and sophomore years I can't recollect much of anything, and, you know, last fall there was a good deal of - by that time there was a good deal of general excitement about it. But I can't say that I really spent a good deal of time talking about it, which had a certain advantage, in that I came in without a lot of the preconceptions of many, you know, sort of liberal type white people have when they go into the movement, and so I was much more open to indoctrination and a fairly hard line. Ah, which I got exposed to intensively, and so a lot of the things like, you know, many - I've found it very difficult to convince many white people of the virtual necessity, certainly in the North - I'm not going to speak authoritatively on the South, but I think I can speak authoritatively on the North - of some sort of black determination - control of the areas where black people live in the North.

Q: What do you think is necessary for this kind of conviction?

A: Well, I mean, you just have to - I mean first of all you have to realize that the - what kind of conviction, excuse me?

Q: Well, for convincing the people in the North of the Negro situation.

A: Well, I'm not...

Q: Helping them realize what it is.

A: Oh, I don't know. The trouble is that people don't believe, you know, things like police brutality in the North is something, you know, no one believes, and you can point ot the fact that - you know, for instance in Detroit, all nine city councilmen are white, there's only been one Negro who's ever sat on the city council, 97% of the police force, which is clearly the effective physical controller of the ghetto and so forth - the fact is that, I mean, the Man does sit heavily on people. And people say, "Yeah..." But, I don't know, the thing is people have this dichotomy of perception about - between the North and the South. You see the North as being somehow fundamentally different from the South, and the South is somehow extraordinarily backward, and in the North people aren't racists or something...well, that's hogwash, I mean. You know, you have only to read the...uh... current things about, say, the current trial of Dearborn Mayer up at ...(?)Hubbard. There's the case of Dearborn,
which is a lily-white city of something like 100,000 people, where the fact that the Negro was moving in...they wrecked the guys' houses, and the mob rioted, and the mayor and everyone and the chief of police just sat back and said, 'Well, you know, this is part of our policy, we keep them out of here.' And the lily-white housing and the whole... in the last two or three years an extremely strong political machine has been built, uh...in the city of Detroit on the basis of racism, and people come around and says give 50¢ to the Detroit Home-owners Council to keep the Negroes out of this neighborhood and that, you know, and so I don't know, the people are a lot more settled, but we've had people beaten and out by the police, you know, and casualties, and last year we had our office completely demolished by the police. So, uh, I mean, we aren't faced with the threat of, you know, physical death, which people have in the South, and the problems are much more...are not nearly so concrete as like being smothered by a pillow, but I don't know, I mean I'm not a...I've gotten sort of cynical about white people and what they're really willing to do, and like Walter Ruther comes down and stands on the...in Selma and gets his picture in Life magazine, and the UAW still has--you know, it's still virtually impossible for Negroes to get apprenticed to skilled trades because of the UAW, so to me that just makes them a big fool.

Q: I'm interested in just how much you think you can affect the situation either in the North or down here this summer in the South.

A: Well, I mean there are two things: one is the Movement, I mean, the Movement has become a way of life, which is sort of bad in a way because a lot of people think that whites should get out of the Movement, and whites can't--and this is something that I agree with--whites can't provide leadership for the Movement. But I think that it's...uh...I mean all that I hope to do is to be able to get people talking themselves about their problems and see what they want to do about it, and to work--the thing which is really beautiful is that you sort of, you know, commune with people, workers, auto workers, mothers, or something, and you get them to sort of talk about their problems and to begin to articulate what's wrong, and of course, you know, when you start these things, you always have enough self-confidence to believe you have some notion of what the right direction is, but, uh, this is something which is...which I hope to do because, I mean, one of the things that takes place, it seems to me, sort of inevitably, is the mutual absorption of the organized into the organizers, uh, in the sense that after a while you sort of become part of the community yourself, which is,...I mean theoretically there are strong reasons why the Movement should not be inter-racial, I mean, just practical reasons. I think sometimes we in Detroit have been handicapped because we're such a high proportion of whites--about half the staff--but then there are certain cities, I mean Harlem, you know, you just don't talk about whites in Harlem.
Uh, but I don't know. I'm not convinced for a variety of reasons that it's entirely a bad thing to—maybe it's just a rationalization as a white.

Q: Do you plan to stay down here just for the summer?

A: Um, yes, because it's not a question --I mean, I feel it's not--it's a question of the Movement in the fact that there are comparatively few people in the northern Movement, and that the northern Movement has got itself hung up on a lot of irrelevancies, such as tutorials and so forth. I mean, I think we ought to join a group in Detroit, but uh...you know, I think the northern...as the process of industrialization of the Negroes--or rather the assimilation of the Negroes from the agrarian in to industrial roles--there will be an increasing focus on urban problems. I understand that Robert Moses has gone into Birmingham to study these urban problems and building organization in an urban area,...I mean, God knows I can't do anything like make the same sort of contribution that he can, but nonetheless, I feel that this is the future area, and there are also some reasons why Detroit is uh...I mean, I think it may well happen someday that the whites are going to get out of the Movement, at least as far as providing leadership, and go to organizing, you know, rights, and...'cause I don't see that...I mean in the North you certainly can't run the interracial movement of a poor thing and get any results out of it.

Q: Do you plan to continue working in the North in the civil rights movement once leaving here?

A: Yeah, I mean I'm going to keep on working on it. I have no particular interest in going back to school. I have done some work, you know, with poor white in Mexico and stuff, but...

Q: Then you don't plan to go back to school?

A: Well, I mean, school's sort of irrelevant, really. I can ...(?)... and go to take examinations every so often, and it provides a certain flow of information which you might not get otherwise. I really don't regard myself as a student. The image which we present...some of us don't have any image in Detroit really, except that white people in Gross Point and Bloomfield really give us a lot of gruff—but the image we have is called ACME, which is the Adult Community Movement for Equality, and you know, we sort of avoid the student image because none of the ACME community people are students, and as it is now, half of our staff in Detroit, as a matter of fact, 4 out of 7 salaried people in Detroit are community people, none of whom have ever gone near a university, and none of the people we've had have ever, you know, finished at the university, so the name Northern Student Movement is a little bit ridiculous.
Q: Were you part of ACME?

A: Well, as I say this process of mutual ACME is technically a community group, but you know, staff people become absorbed in it and it becomes their social life with the group, and you know, like we had some really fantastic going-away parties in which we tore up about half of Belle Isle. And so the question is, you know, as long as the number of people within the community group is small, this happens inevitably to you know, I mean. I, it wasn't my primary job to work with ACME directly, but...

Q: You were talking about ACME (after announcing second side of tape)?

A: Oh, I was saying that I theoretically don't work directly with them the way I did, you know, a lot of work, and most of my friends are ACME people, so um...so I sort of regard myself as being a member of ACME, and one of the things which happened which was sort of funny was that I did a certain amount of work to sort of open up an area of poor whites and Mexicans, and there were quite a lot of Negroes in the area, and it's a funny area because it has...because most of the people are the most completely alienated that I've ever met, you know, they hate the police with a passion--as ACME does, of course. Why, I used the ACME image, even though it was, you know...cause we'd gotten a lot of publicity in the newspapers and so forth, even though it was a Negro group, and I sold or gave away quite a lot of ACME buttons, which are sort of interesting because they're--I think I may have one with me--black unity-type emblem with black hands shaking hands instead of the usual--so people suggested that I might have some made up with two white hands, you know, clasping each other. But on the other hand, Detroit also has large concentrations of southern whites, and on these two occasions we've been counter-picketted, and in one case there was a slight incident between the two picket lones. But, so obviously, there are many areas which are not prepared for this kind of thing.

Q: I see. Back to your own background again: for what reasons did you leave school? academic or personal or what?

A: I don't know...Well, mostly personal reasons, actually. Um, I don't know, it's sort of a complicated business, but the whole thing that I was doing didn't especially attract me, and I had sort of an unpleasant personal affair, so I decided I might as well leave, and I did so.

Q: Could you explain the unpleasant personal affair just a bit?

A: Well, I mean it's no big thing. I just was unhappy because of a girl, that's all. It's no big thing, really.
Q: What was your academic standing at the time when you left school?

A: Oh I don't know, I did pretty well. I was on the... well, that's not exactly true. I was in the honors curriculum, mostly because I'd been put... well, at the time when I entered the university, I generally had sort of a low B average. I usually got A's in history and literature courses and so forth, but I don't know, I failed a couple of science courses and really goofed off at most other things.

Q: Were you majoring in English or history or what?

A: I was majoring in history, which is not too specific. I'd had very little American history, which is unfortunate sometimes since I have to do a certain amount of work on what actually happened. American history is... and I'd had no political science to speak of, but I picked up a lot of stuff, a lot of sociology and stuff and other...

Q: To change the subject again: what are your views toward morality, personal morality and morality of others as well?

A: Well, I don't know exactly what you mean by that. I mean, my personal moral feeling is that anything that is accomplished through making other people afraid is wrong. That's something I really do believe, I mean as far as personal relations and so forth. Anything which deprives people of their dignity is wrong. Now, I don't know, if you're talking about sexual morality, I don't know..... The question is, when you're so involved in the Movement and so forth, and particularly when you're involved in a lot of tense situations with a good deal of physical conflict and constant confrontation and so forth, a lot of the social forms and, you know, things which are so highly thought of in middle-class society become sort of irrelevant. People tend to move to sort of a war-time morality, uh, in the sense that, you know, next week or tomorrow you may be beaten or in jail or something, you know, so you more or less take anything that comes along.

Q: How do you feel towards your fellow civil rights workers down here?

A: Well, I haven't met... I'm in sort of an ambiguous position because I haven't had much more experience in this sort of thing that I'll be doing than most of them have, and I've had more northern experience than most of them have had, but I don't yet know many of them personally, and it takes a while to develop the kind of relationships, you know, where you trust people and feel comfortable in a tight spot with them. But you know, I have a certain amount... well, anyone who comes down here has to have a certain amount of purpose, and it's not as if people were
coming and--you know now after last summer and a lot of publicity and stuff what happens in Mississippi, and people know that, you know, that there are people down here who will kill them, you know, and people still come. And I feel that, you know...well, I won't say that I think the people in Mississippi are, you know, very arbitrary, but the people in the Movement in general, because I feel sometimes about my friends in the northern civil rights movement would also take a hell of a lot, I mean, both physically and in jails and so forth, but I feel in general that people in the Movement are people, my people, as far as I'm concerned.

Q: Do you feel that personally you are perhaps more committed or less committed that some of the other people down here?

A: I don't know, I...

Q: To the civil rights movement and your position here?

A: I don't know, that's a big question. I don't think that I'm very...I mean, I don't think that I have the sort of personality, the sort of intense mood and commitment to things like, you know, justice and equality and so forth. But other people do, because I have the sort of liberal heritage that many people seem to have, but you know, I was a strong racist when I lived in Washington, you know, but I can remember the days when our school was integrated and everything.

Q: How long ago was this now?

A: When I was in the fourth grade, I guess. But then, you know, they lived on their side of the park, and we lived on our side of the park. Nothing ever happened really, but there was a great deal of hostility and so forth. I mean, we always took a reasonable attitude compared with some people, but, nonetheless, compared with my current standards I was definitely a racist in those days. So I don't have this heritage, and so I don't have this deeply ingrown moral commitment, but after a while your thinking becomes, you know, the movement becomes part of your thinking, and you're in it, looking out perhaps. Perhaps you don't think as much about these things, and it seems natural, you know, and I perhaps have never had as many some kind of social things built into me as other people do, so it doesn't, you know, bother me, you know, associating with Negroes or something like that. Once I started doing it there was never any big problem.

Q: When did you first start doing it?

A: Well, January was the first time really. Um, but then the first people I had contact with were very much an elite
group, and they were... had fairly... well, I won't say all Movement people are, you know, very conscious of class lines and try very hard to break them down, but they came from a university-educated strata. But then about March--I don't know, maybe not March--but I had some contacts in February with ACME people and began to break the ice, and the last few months, you know, I've gotten really close to them. And uh... You know, as far as association, we've had all our parties together. One of the guys... with the project director--the project director is white--the other fellow is Negro--I don't get along with him particularly well, but that has nothing to do with... you know, there's nothing racial about that as far as I can tell. I know lots of other people--like the head of ACME and I are very close friends, and he's very much of a community Negro, and you know... but I'd live all my life among them and do everything with them and so forth, you know, and I really don't have any relations outside of the movement, so you know...

Q: There's just one last story I'd like to cover; I don't know what to call it--the hierarchy of values of a sort--in a way you've given up your life in the North for a less comfortable life here in the South.

A: That's not true.

Q: Oh?

A: Because uh... I mean it's the... I don't think it's the combination... well, actually I ate better and lived better, except when I was in jail, when I was in Alabama than I do in the North. You know, the amount of money you get from the northern movement doesn't pay for anything very luxurious in the way of combinations or food or anything, and I mean the South is much more extreme--I mean, there's a possibility of getting killed, and people are generally beaten more severely in the South and so forth--but you know, I've been in jail a couple of times in Detroit and picked up a couple of other times and released, and it's no...(inaudible)... big police cruiser comes sit out in front, and they'll follow people from the office, and they'll just pull them over and look at their license or something.

Q: What were you arrested for up there?

A: Well, once I was arrested for... um... well, we were leafleting in the area, and some of the kids got into a hassle with someone who didn't want to take a leaflet, and they broke his window and was I was arrested for that, but I was never charged for that. And I was arrested once for driving with an Illinois license... well, I was driving a car with Michigan license plates while I was carrying an Illinois drivers' license, and I got acquitted on that, but I've been... I've been pretty lucky, because 7 of our
community people were beaten by police over in a parking lot in Jefferson Station, and then they were all charged with resisting arrest and obstructing an officer in carrying out his duty; which is a felony, and they were dragged up for trial under that charge. The most usual thing when you're arrested is for a policeman to charge you with something and say you provoked him or something like that.

Q: Were you arrested at Selma?
A: At Selma? No, I was never arrested when I was in Selma. I was arrested in Montgomery twice.

Q: What were you charged with there?
A: Refusing to obey a lawful order of a police officer.

Q: Meaning?
A: Well, they told us to stop picketing the state capitol, and he said we would have to disperse. Well, first the State Troopers forced us off the sidewalks, and then they came up and told us we were blocking traffic and would have to disperse and that anybody who didn't disperse would be arrested, so we sat down, and they threw us in the paddy-wagons and so forth.

Q: Was this after the march had reached Montgomery?
A: No, this was before the march. I was in jail when everyone was marching around. I mean, I've sort of gotten cynical about...anything...I mean, I generally don't feel that anything which is staged in that extravaganza level is likely to be accompanied by too much violence against the march itself. But, uh, there was...uh, Mrs. Liuzzo was murdered on the highway there, and I had no part—I mean, you know, you get a certain feeling of pride, 'cause we...the first time we didn't know positively that we were going to be arrested. There were about 500 members of a group called the Concerned Citizens of Alabama, which is a front for the Concerned Citizens of the Klan, who were up and screaming and yelling about twenty feet away, and uh, so we were...that was sort of a hair-raising experience. But the second time...well, the first time we went down, we had about 80 people, and part of them got sick from fasting too much. And I went out on bond, and I decided...after I got out and had something to eat, I felt better. Then I got some more people to go out and get arrested, but only a few because they were really having some trouble getting some of the people out, so I went out and said, you know, it's no big thing, and it's not after the first couple of days, you know, they start getting all kinds of pressure from the Justice Department and everyone. Well, the first couple of days were pretty rough because they took us out to the penitentiary which was outside of Montgomery, but
after a while things really sort of...except for the fact that everyone was fasting, things weren't too bad. So I went down to another group and took six people and...we were arrested, and this time we...everyone decided we'd just walk into the paddy-wagon instead of getting thrown in, so we walked in, and it was all very peaceful and orderly. And uh...so...that's about all there was to it, you know.

Q: What do you plan to do--very long-range plans? What kind of a career are you planning for yourself? Have you made any plans yet?

A: I sort of avoid thinking about the subject. I have one of these over-planned lives; my parents were always concerned, and are still concerned, about my future and everything, but that's all, you know...I mean, you just, as far as I can see I'll be keeping an eye on the Movement, and after a while, I mean...you get certain opportunities to sell out if you want to to all kinds of groups from the Poverty Program to Community Race and Service and what have you. I don't know, I imagine I'll be drafted sooner or later, but...I sort of avoid thinking about that. Right now I have a couple of cases, two cases in Montgomery that are in the federal court, and as far as I know, when you have cases against you in the federal court you cannot be drafted, so I'm not worried about it at the moment.

Q: Is it all right with you if we use any of the foregoing on a radio tape?

A: Sure.

Q: Thank you.